

Where to go for more information about vaccines:

Vaccinating Your Child: Questions & Answers for the Concerned Parent
by Sharon G. Humiston, MD, MPH, and Cynthia Good

Vaccines: What Every Parent Should Know
by Paul A. Offit, MD, and Louis M. Bell, MD

The Allied Vaccine Group
(<http://www.vaccine.org>)
is comprised of websites dedicated to presenting valid scientific information about the sometimes confusing subject of vaccines.

Call your doctor, your local health department or
1-888-76-SHOTS



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A close-up, black and white photograph of a young girl's face. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. Her hands are visible near her face, with fingers slightly curled. The lighting is soft, highlighting her features.

VACCINE SAFETY

What parents need to know

Are vaccines safe?

Yes, vaccines are safe. But all medicines and even vaccines do have some risks. Talk to your doctor about the vaccines your child needs. Then you can compare the risks of immunization to the benefits the vaccine gives your child. If your child does not get the vaccines, what risks might your child face if he or she gets the disease?

Do vaccines cause chronic diseases such as autism, diabetes, Crohn's disease or cancer?

Vaccines have been used for many years. Research studies have found no proof that vaccines cause these diseases.

But how are parents supposed to know whether or not these studies are reliable? Doctors rely on the advice of groups made up of experts to decide whether to use certain medicines or vaccines. These groups include the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

It's hard for parents to know all there is to know about vaccine safety. The groups of experts listed above have made brochures and Vaccine Information Statements to help parents make informed decisions about vaccination. Ask your doctor or nurse for this information.

Are vaccines really needed?

There are viruses and germs that still exist that cause diseases. We can now prevent these diseases with vaccines. Without vaccines, diseases like polio, measles, mumps, rubella, and whooping cough would still be common.

In the 1940s and 1950s, before polio vaccine, 20,000 people got polio in the United States every year.

German measles (rubella) is usually a mild illness in children, but if a pregnant woman gets rubella early in her pregnancy, her baby is likely to be born with birth defects such as heart problems, cataracts, developmental disabilities, and deafness. These defects are called Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS). In 1964-1965, before we started giving rubella vaccine, about 20,000 babies were born with CRS. Of these, 11,600 were deaf, 3,580 were blind, 1,800 were developmentally disabled and 2,100 died shortly after birth.

Before 1990 (when we started using Hib vaccine), about 600 children died every year from meningitis and many were deaf or developmentally disabled.

Before whooping cough (pertussis) vaccine was available, between 150,000 and 260,000 people got pertussis and about 9,000 died every year.

Won't giving my child so many shots overload my child's immune system?

Our immune systems are faced with many different germs every day. Babies touch many things that may not be clean and then put their fingers in their mouths. Every time we go out in public, we are around people who may be sick. Our immune systems are used to dealing with many germs at one time. Giving children several shots at one time is not a burden on the immune system and does not overload or weaken it.

Why are chemicals and other things added to vaccines?

Chemicals and other things are added to vaccines for the same reasons they are added to foods or medicines, to prevent the growth of germs and reduce the chance that the vaccine will spoil. These things may also be added to vaccines to help them work better in the body. Talk to your doctor or nurse about getting a copy of the vaccine package insert. This insert lists everything that is in the vaccines.